

TEACHING YOUR STUDENTS HOW TO MAKE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION MEANS THAT YOU ARE ALSO TEACHING THEM IMPORTANT LIFE SKILLS.

Whether we like to admit it or not, we do judge books by their covers. When we meet people for the first time, we immediately take a mental snapshot and begin sizing them up and judging them, usually on a subconscious level. Managers and business owners often base hiring decisions on first impressions. That's why it is so important to teach students to make a great first impression—before they go on that first job interview.

As a customer service writer and coach, I often meet with managers who tell me how tough it is to find that rare person who comes across well in a job interview. Managers do not have unrealistic expectations; they just want to hire people who they believe can develop into valuable employees. A nice appearance and a good attitude go a long way toward making a good first impression with managers. Make a poor first impression, and that may very well be the last impression you have the opportunity to make.

When students go on their first job interviews, they do not have experience to share with prospective managers, so they must rely on the ability to sell themselves as being right for the job. Even for those students who are timid, introverted or quiet, first impression skills can be learned. The best part of teaching these soft skills is that they will help students, not only in interview situations, but in every situation in which they have the opportunity to make a first impression.

Teaching how to make a great first impression is as simple as teaching your A, A, A's: Appearance, Attitude and Actions.

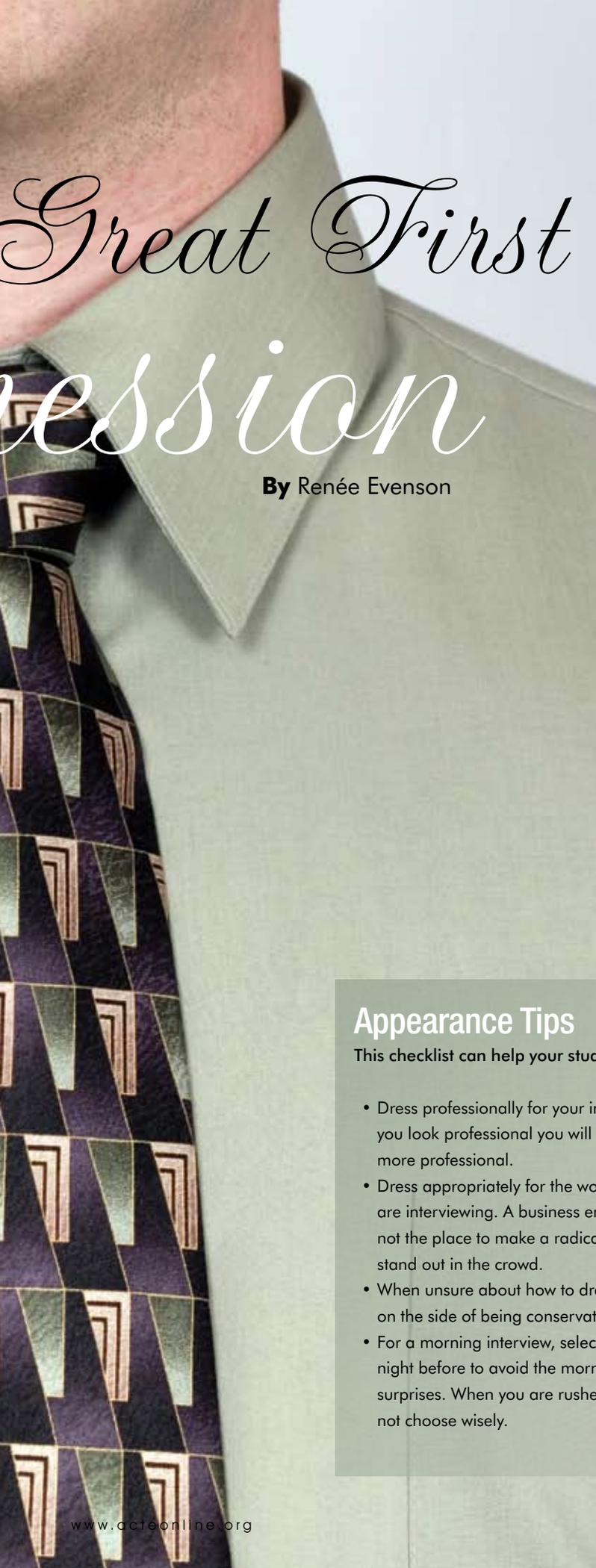
Begin by asking students the following questions. What

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Making a Great First Impression



Great First Impression

By Renée Evenson

message are you sending to a prospective employer if you:

- don't dress appropriately at your interview;
- don't smile, don't speak clearly, yawn or appear bored during an interview; and
- don't pay attention or respond well to questions throughout your interview?

Appearance

When prospective employers see you for the first time, they quickly size you up and begin forming their first impression. Your appearance tells others who you are and what you think about yourself. A business environment is not the place to make a bold or extreme statement. If you don't dress appropriately for your interview, you might present an obstacle that blocks the person interviewing you from forming a positive first impression. Cleaning, grooming and dressing properly might take a little extra time, but the payoff is worth it. When you look good, you will feel good about yourself.

Before you go on your interview, find out what the people who work there wear, and wear the type of clothing that fits the personality of the business. When in doubt about what type of clothing is suited for the job, choose something conservative. Save your party clothes for going out, and save your torn jeans and old tees for hanging out with friends.

Make sure you look groomed. This means your face, body, hair, fingernails and teeth are clean, your clothes are clean and pressed, and your overall image is professional. Put that all together and you present a groomed look.

Appearance Tips

This checklist can help your students ensure they appear ready for the job market.

- Dress professionally for your interview. When you look professional you will tend to act more professional.
- Dress appropriately for the work for which you are interviewing. A business environment is not the place to make a radical statement or stand out in the crowd.
- When unsure about how to dress, always rule on the side of being conservative.
- For a morning interview, select your outfit the night before to avoid the morning rush or any surprises. When you are rushed, you might not choose wisely.
- Make sure you are clean before you leave home. Take a shower, wash your hair, scrub your fingernails, and brush your teeth.
- Make sure you are groomed before you leave home. Style your hair, wear wrinkle-free clothes, file your fingernails, and shine your shoes.
- Look in a full-length mirror before you leave home. If you do not have one, buy one. A full-length mirror is a good investment.
- Arrive early for your interview so you have time to calm yourself and check yourself before your meeting.

Attitude Tips

A good attitude can be the most positive characteristic when it comes to making a good first impression, so encourage your students to use the following tips.

- When speaking, use good grammar, such as yes, please, thank you, sir or ma'am.
- During the interview, stay interested. One of the best things you can do to show others you are in a positive frame of mind is to stay focused on them.
- When the time is appropriate, ask questions about the job.
- Believe that you can make a positive difference for this company and share how.
- Act confidently. Even if you do not feel so confident, maintaining eye contact, asking good questions and staying interested will make you appear confident.
- It is up to you to sell yourself. No one can do that better than you. Be prepared to share your good qualities and how you can be an asset.
- Selling yourself does not mean bragging, but rather presenting yourself well by putting your best face forward and by showcasing your good qualities.
- Always focus on your best qualities. If the manager asks about your experience, rather than saying, "I haven't worked with customers before," put a positive spin on it by saying, "Even though I haven't worked with customers before, I like meeting new people and I know I'll enjoy helping them."

Action Tips

Sometimes actions speak more loudly than words, and these actions can work for your students during the interview process.

- Eat something nutritious before the interview and make sure you get enough rest the night before to help you maintain your energy level.
- If you have the opportunity, learn about the job before going on the interview to come across more intelligently.
- Listen actively and completely.
- You cannot listen and talk at the same time. Wait until the interviewer is done speaking to reply. Don't interrupt.
- Listen for what is not said. Pay attention to nonverbal clues and tone of voice.
- Before responding or forming your conclusion, gather as much information as you need to make sure you understand correctly. Ask for clarification if you are unsure of the question being asked.
- Be prepared to answer questions. If you don't know the answer, try to offer an alternative solution to the problem or question posed. "I've never had that happen, but I had a similar situation that happened at school, and here's how I handled that."



Attitude

You can wear the right clothes and be well groomed, yet still convey a poor first impression. Your body language counts as much as being clean and groomed. Whether you present an indifferent, happy, bored or friendly demeanor, it is going to show.

When you meet your prospective employer, smile, make eye contact, shake hands firmly, and speak clearly. Maintain a relaxed and open demeanor. Hold your head high and keep your facial expressions friendly. Sit up, yet sit comfortably. Make eye contact throughout the interview. Smile as often as is appropriate.

The best thing you can do for yourself, not to mention for others, is to always maintain a positive attitude. No matter how you feel on the inside, presenting a positive face to the world goes a long way. When you focus on being positive, you will form the habit of being positive. During a job interview, your attitude is going to speak volumes about you.

A positive attitude can even overcome a poor appearance during an interview. If you find you are not dressed right, be up front and say something to your prospective employer, such as, "I noticed I am not dressed the way the employees are, and I apologize for not knowing in advance what is appropriate."

No one is going to hold it against you when you take responsibility for your actions. That shows you have a good attitude and are willing to do what is necessary for the job.

Actions

Beyond having a nice appearance and a good attitude, your actions are going to say a lot about you. Actions are the follow up and follow through on your appearance and attitude. The interviewer is going to read your actions and translate them into how you will handle yourself on the job.

During your interview, pay attention and listen completely. If you don't pay attention during your interview, you send the message that you probably aren't going to pay attention on the job. Paying attention and listening go hand-in-hand. If you do not pay attention, you cannot listen well, and if you do not listen well, you are not paying attention. When you communicate during your interview, speaking well is important, but listening well is even more important. If you do not listen well, you will not know how to respond appropriately.

Eat a healthy meal before going on the interview so you will maintain a steady energy level throughout the interview. If you find you are feeling drowsy, breathe deeply to pump oxygen into your system. Making eye contact, smiling when appropriate, nodding from time to time, and sitting up convey a high energy level.

Your actions will have a lasting effect on your prospective employer. Practice with a family member or friend before going on

your interview to help you overcome nervousness. Think of some questions you want to ask.

For example, “What will my job duties be?” shows that you are interested in the position. Also think of questions a manager might ask you: “Why do you want to work here?” or, “What can you bring to our company?”

The better prepared you are before your interview, the easier it will be for you to make a great first impression during your interview.

Truly Great Impressions for Life

When you teach your students to prepare for their first interview by dressing for success, by presenting a positive attitude, and by acting genuinely interested in working for that company, they will make a great first impression.

Also stress to your students that the first impression they give should be the correct impression. Acting out something they are not will only get them so far. They need to be true to themselves. When they let their personality come through and make a great first impression, they are likely to get the job that is right for them.

Finally, share this thought with your students: Every time you are in a situation for the first time, you will be making a first impression on someone. Whether you are at work, at school, meeting your girlfriend’s parents, meeting your boyfriend’s best friend, or saying hello to someone you want to get to know, you are going to make a first impression. Always be prepared to make a great first impression. After all, you never know who you are going to meet. **T**

Teaching Tips

Wrong Way/Right Way

Have your students role play the wrong way and the right way to make a great first impression.

Toss the Ball

Toss a ball to a student and have him or her call out one of the appearance tips; that student will toss the ball to someone else; keep tossing until all the tips have been called out. Repeat for attitude and action tips.

Role-Play Scenarios

Increase your students’ confidence levels by practicing these sample interview questions through role-play scenarios.

Tell me about yourself

Quickly highlight some things about you that tell why you are right for this job: *I’m on the track team at school. I’m competitive, and I enjoy the meets. I also coach younger kids who want to get into track and I really like the feeling of being able to help them.*

Why should we hire you?

Say why and give examples: *I enjoy helping others and solving problems. This job will give me the opportunity to do that.*

Why do you want to work here?

Be specific. Speak positively: *I will enjoy the challenge of working in sales by identifying customers’ needs and finding the right solution for each of them.*

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